

Testimony to the House Military & Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security  
Committee, January 30, 2008  
Regarding House Bill 5632

Good Afternoon, I'm happy to be here on behalf of our military men & women and their families and to be able to talk to you about the Military Family Leave Bill. My name is Suzette Boler.

First I would like to tell you about my situation and then I would like to tell you why I believe this bill is so important.

2 years ago I was terminated from my employment with a company I had been with for 14 months. I was a part-time office assistant, my job duties consisted of helping staff members with office tasks such as filing, data entry, answering phones, mail delivery etc. Not a grand position in most peoples eyes but one of great importance to me. I loved my job and for me, in light of my husbands upcoming deployment to Iraq, it represented sanity, an escape. It was a routine I knew would help in the months ahead.

5 months prior to my husbands deployment I informed my employer of the dates and that my husband, being an Indiana Guardsman, would be leaving from Indianapolis, Indiana. He was to be in Indiana 5 days before leaving, to get paperwork in order and load trucks. He was scheduled to leave on Sunday Oct 16 2005.

I put in a request and was granted 3 unpaid leave days prior to him leaving and 3 unpaid days after his departure to drive back home and regain control before I had to return to work. The week prior to our leaving for Indiana I was called into the HR office and told that 3 days of that time was being taken away, no reason given. I was told I could take the 3 days prior to him leaving or the 3 days after. I had no choice but to take the 3 days prior as I had to accompany him to Indiana. So I choose to give up the 3 days after. This meant I had to be back to work Monday morning after seeing him off in Indiana on Sunday and driving home that night.

After talking to the HR person, I left her office believing that they would allow me to also take the Monday after and be back on Tuesday. I received a call Monday afternoon from the same HR person I had spoken with in the meeting prior to my leaving. She called to inform me I was fired for not being at work Monday morning. Her exact words were "I hate to kick someone when they are down, but we have a business to run"

I worked for this company for 14 months and called in sick 1 time, I was late 1 time, and 1 month prior to my termination I received a letter of recognition from the owners for my accomplishments with the company. I was completely blind sided and this on top of sending my husband to war the day before was almost more emotional stress than I could bear, but I did.

After a family member wrote a letter to the press and my situation became very public, the company then decided to trash my job performance and my reputation. When I lost my job I was hurt but now I was mad and I decided that I was going to fight back, not by suing the company, for which I was told I had sufficient grounds, thereby taking advantage of laws in place for after the fact, but by working to pass a bill protecting other military families before the fact.

Why do I believe this bill is so important and needs to be passed?

If you have never walked in the shoes of a soldier or a family member being deployed, there are not enough words to describe what they go thru. Our military is all volunteer, they go because they choose to defend this country and our way of life. Our soldiers and their families are very aware of the price for the choice they make to defend this country. We spend the few months before deployment getting our affairs in order, making out wills and powers of attorney, just in case.

Those last days you spend with your loved one may be just that; your last. Nobody wants to think their soldier will not make it back home, but that is the reality we military families face. Spending as much time as possible with your soldier becomes very important because that is all we have to hold onto until their homecoming. And then there are the tears, anxiety and emotions to deal with.

The job of our soldiers is to defend our country and the rights and freedoms of those who live here.

The job of our military families is to be their support system. To keep things going while they are gone, and to do the best we can at make life as normal as possible for our children.

The job of the citizens of this country is to be supportive of our soldiers and their families. To help make this unbearable time a little easier for those who are sacrificing their way of life to ensure the freedoms our citizens enjoy .

The job of our legislators is to protect those who are making the sacrifice, from those who would, for whatever reason, deny them the most common of decencies. With the deaths of 3800 plus soldiers, and more then that returning home wounded, I would think the reason for such a bill would be crystal clear.

I certainly do not believe that ensuring our military families 10 days leave during deployment, leave, or homecoming, without threat of termination, is too much to ask for, considering the price paid by these families. I have been thru the deployment of 2 family members, one being my husband and I would not trade those last few moments with him before he left for any job.

The fact is, these families should not be made to choose. Our country has asked our military families to give up 18 months and sometimes more of their lives to go into harms way and defend this country and those who live here. Asking companies in America to ensure those family members 10 days for time with their loved ones is a very small price for them to pay. I think it is sad that there needs to be legislation to force employers to do the right thing, but the truth is there are many of these types of companies and they create the need.

I want our state and our country to not just talk the talk, but walk the walk when it concerns making the lives of our soldiers and their families a little easier. No matter what side of the fence you are on regarding this war, these men and women leave their loved ones behind and do a job that a lot of people in this country would never dream of doing. Making these companies, who enjoy their freedoms off the backs of these soldiers and their families, to step up to the plate with an expression of compassion and gratitude, is, again, not too much to ask.

There are many others out there with stories like mine and worse. My husband came home a wounded warrior and our lives have been forever changed. It's been a long uphill battle since his return because of the way our military and our VA system takes care of their own, or should I say lack there of. But in spite of all the hurts, pain, and red tape, if my husband were asked to go again, he would go. I am very proud of him and his beliefs and the love he has for this country.

We have come a long way since the Vietnam era, but there is much yet to be done for these military men and women, past & present, and their families. Actions do speak louder than words. We can believe all day long that our military families need this bill but it does no good to believe until we put that belief into action and actually do something. I don't have to tell you that the perception most Americans have of politicians is "All talk and no do". Please prove them wrong this time.

In closing, I lost my job because there were no laws to protect me before the fact. If the state of Michigan can pass one small bill to give military families peace of mind, and allow them to have the time they so desperately need with their loved ones, then I feel we have made one small step in the right direction.

Thank You for allowing me this time and for your attention to this most important bill.

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